DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 625 CE 076 851

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Hughes, Maria; Gray, Sue |
| TITLE | Promoting Learning in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. |
| INSTITUTION | Further Education Development Agency, London (England). |
| ISSN | ISSN-1361-9977 |
| PUB DATE | 1998-00-00 |
| NOTE | 39p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Information Centre, Further Education Development Agency, Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH, United Kingdom (7.50 pounds). |
| PUB TYPE | Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Research (143) |
| JOURNAL CIT | FE Matters; v2 n9 1998 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC02 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Adult Education; Adult Learning; Case Studies; Delivery Systems; *Education Work Relationship; Educational Needs; Foreign Countries; *Industrial Training; Instructional Development; *Lifelong Learning; *Marketing; Needs Assessment; Position Papers; *School Business Relationship; *Small Businesses |
| IDENTIFIERS | *United Kingdom |

ABSTRACT

In 1996, small and medium-sized enterprises constituted 99% of all businesses in the United Kingdom in all but the electricity, gas, and water supply sector, providing 46% of nongovernment employment. SMEs' concern with day-to-day demands leaves them with limited time and resources to consider their training needs. Although providing support and training for SMEs is not a lucrative source of income for further education (FE) colleges, it is essential because developing a learning culture in SMEs is critical to securing British competitiveness in global markets. Good relationships with training and enterprise councils are important, as are partnerships with other agencies providing support. The serial recommends that FE colleges must address their image with SMEs, clarify the benefits of training to firms and firm profitability, and consider the effects of seasonal and shift work when marketing and delivering training for SMEs. Among the report's recommendations are: a strategic and structured approach to meeting the needs of SMEs should be balanced with flexibility and speed of response and the use of technology to reach people and access learning may provide appropriate delivery methods in the medium to long term. The importance of networking and informal learning is also be emphasized. (Appended are the following: audit research tool and example; criteria for college action planning pro forma; and two case studies.) (MN)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

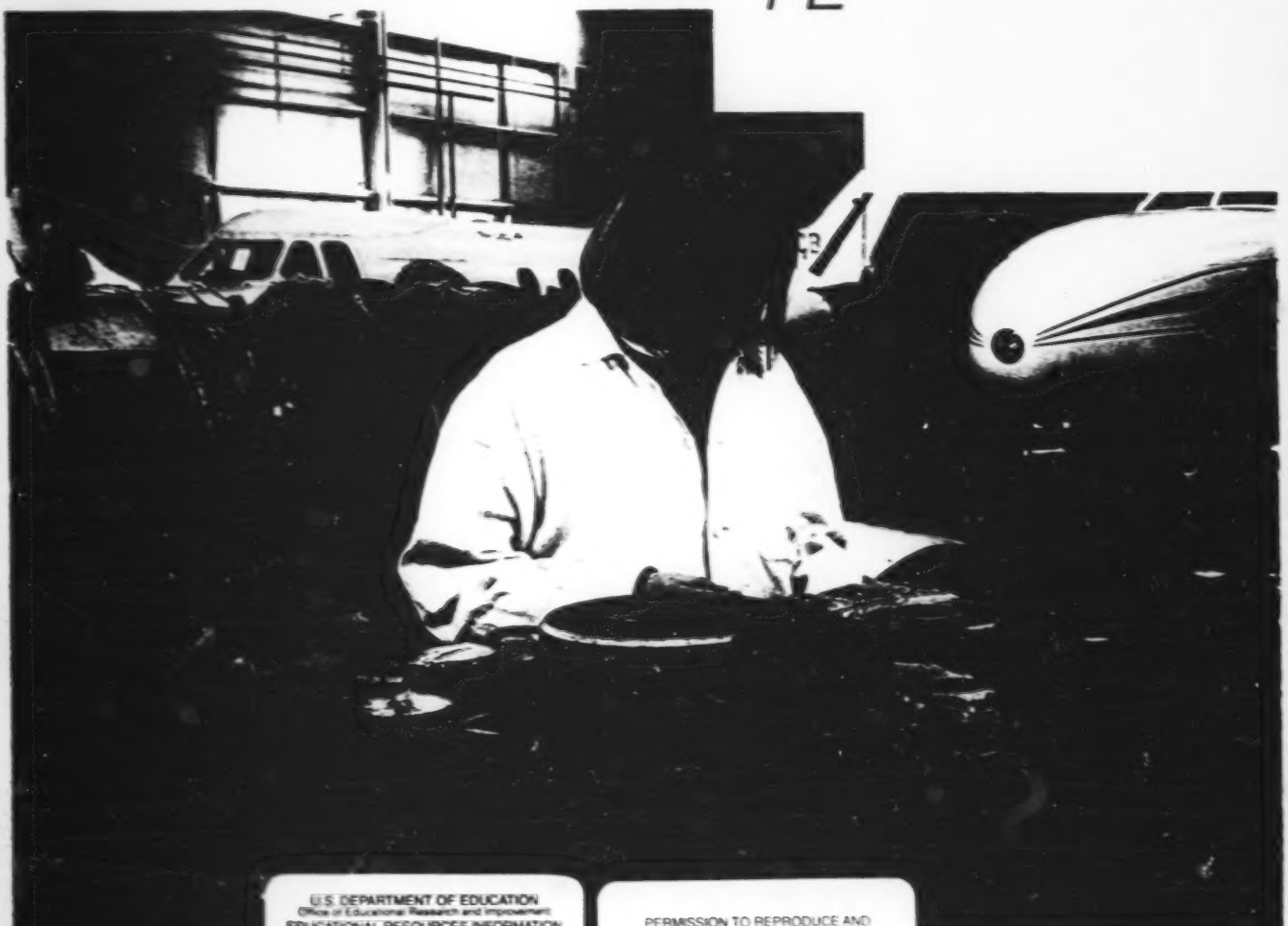
ED 421 625

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

# Promoting learning in small and medium-sized enterprises

*Maria Hughes and Sue Gray*

FE



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Bourne

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

2

*Furthering Local Economies*

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

# Promoting learning in small and medium-sized enterprises

*Maria Hughes and Sue Gray*

FE matters

3

Published by the **Further Education Development Agency** (FEDA), Dumbarton House, 68 Oxford Street, London W1N 0DA
Tel: 0171 436 0020 Fax: 0171 436 0349

Feedback and orders should be directed to:
**Information Centre**, FEDA,
Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH
Tel: 0171 962 1280 Fax: 0171 962 1266

*Registered with the Charity Commissioners*

Editor: **Jennifer Rhys**

Designer: **Mike Pope**

Printed by: **Blackmore Limited, Shaftesbury, Dorset**

Cover photograph: **courtesy Barry College**

**ISSN: 1361-9977**

**© 1998 FEDA**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the copyright owner, except as follows:

FEDA grants the purchaser a non-transferable licence to use any case studies and evaluation frameworks as follows: (i) they may be photocopied and used as many times as required, within a single site in the purchasing institution solely; (ii) short excerpts from them may be incorporated into any development paper or review document if the source is acknowledged and the document is not offered for sale; (iii) permission for other uses should be sought from FEDA, Blagdon.

## Acknowledgements

FEDA would like the following for contributing to the case study material for this publication:

- Steve Thomas, Bishop Auckland College
- Janice Driffill, Dearne Valley College
- Lili Tabiner, Grantham College
- Stephen Gill, Halton College
- Anne-Marie Grey, Hertford Regional College
- Denys Avis, Kingsway College
- Barry Coleman, Matthew Boulton College
- Shahram Safavi, Reading College
- John Nash, St Austell College

## About the authors

**Maria Hughes** is FEDA's Regional Representative based in the Northern Region. She undertakes a range of curriculum research and development activities nationally and within the region. Maria's portfolio of work includes partnership between the FE sector and employers. She also plays a significant role in FEDA's Curriculum and Qualifications Programme area.

**Sue Gray** was, until her untimely death in 1997, FEDA's Regional Representative based in the South East region and a member of the Learning at Work team. This book is dedicated to her memory.

# Contents


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Summary | 4 |
| | Foreword<br>by Geraldine Kenney-Wallace | 6 |
| 1 | Introduction | 7 |
| 2 | A growing sector | 9 |
| 3 | Determining priorities for action | 12 |
| 4 | Promotion and marketing | 15 |
| 5 | Designing and delivering learning programmes | 21 |
| 6 | Management issues | 26 |
| 7 | Conclusions and issues | 29 |
| | Appendices | |
| 1 | Audit research tool and example | 30 |
| 2 | Criteria for college action-planning pro forma | 32 |
| 3 | Case studies | 33 |

# Summary

## Understanding the client base

- In 1996 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) made up 99% of all business in the UK in all but one industry, and provided 46% of non-government employment. They are of crucial importance to the national economy.
- However, their contribution to the economy, at 42% of UK total turnover, falls below their potential and they consistently under-perform.
- Their concern with 'firefighting' and day-to-day demands, with little time or resources to consider their training needs, is a major factor in their lack of success.
- The absence of sustained funding, from employers themselves, individuals or central government, probably limits take-up of training.
- This culture of short-termism inhibits long-term economic development.
- A learning culture needs to be developed to secure British competitiveness in global markets. Such a huge undertaking requires partnership approaches locally and nationally.
- SMEs are not a homogeneous group, and differences in sectors and size need to be taken into account when providing support. It is important to understand the client base – colleges should beware of offering solutions without understanding the problem.
- Definitions of SMEs vary. Turnover is often used as the principal criterion, but this can conflict with other criteria such as the number of employees or management style – which is typically entrepreneurial or personalised in SMEs.
- The main criteria which do not conflict tend to be economic, i.e. linking small firms with a relatively small share in their respective marketplace, and statistical, i.e.with a limit of 200 employees.
- Other factors may be as important, such as:
  - the level of role specificity and differentiation within the firm
  - growth rate
  - length of time established
  - the norm in the area or region
  - level of reserves
  - supply chain issues
  - owner-manager or subsidiary of a larger firm.

## Determining priorities

- There is a serious lack of reliable data on SMEs, and colleges need to draw on a wide range of external and internal sources to establish the SME client base in their 'travel to learn' (TTL) area.
- Providing support and training for SMEs is not a lucrative source of income for colleges. The dilemma which colleges need to resolve is determining the balance between income generation and fulfilling their mission.
- Colleges need to consider how to register the benefits to college, e.g. increased responsiveness, and what performance measures are appropriate.
- Good relationships with TECs are important – not just with staff concerned with education programmes, but also those concerned with Business Links, etc. This may be difficult when college catchment areas span more than one TEC area or where the TEC, or its subsidiary, is itself a training provider.
- Partnerships with other agencies providing support are essential to ensure:
  - complementary rather than competitive activity
  - involvement in development activity of other players, e.g. as advisers or steering group members
  - that interested parties play to their strengths
  - that roles and responsibilities are identified and confusion avoided.
- The starting point for working with SMEs may be quite low in some colleges.

## Marketing

- Colleges need to address their image with SMEs that may not think of them as a natural source of training and support. This will involve raising the college profile, and in-house staff development to develop the right ethos and the capacity to deliver.
- The key to future success may lie in identifying a named contact, who is available and able to talk sensibly to companies. Personal contact is a vital component of promoting learning in SMEs. Colleges need to consider how to resource this.
- Colleges need to clarify the benefits of training and its relationship to the profitability of firms.
- Targeting firms in an Enterprise Zone may be useful. There may be associated grant aid to resource training.
- Strong Business Clubs can be a useful way of contacting employers and promoting college services.
- Telesales may be a cost-effective and efficient way of contacting SMEs, but it works best when trained staff are used.
- Colleges need to consider the effects of seasonal and shift work when marketing and delivering training for SMEs. Flexible timetabling – working evenings and weekends – is essential.

## Management issues

- A strategic and structured approach to meeting the needs of SMEs should be balanced with flexibility and speed of response. Critical success factors for effective learning need to be considered.
- Allowing sufficient time for development and return on investment is essential.
- The diversity of small firms presents colleges with major resourcing issues, particularly in remote rural areas.
- Staffing requirements for this kind of work will include a wide range of professionals – not just teachers and lecturers. It is important to match the the skills of the staff to the requirements of the job. Incentives to college staff may need to be considered.
- Ways of harnessing the physical and human resources of the college need to be developed. Although discrete units may provide solutions to issues such as flexibility and speed of response, they may also duplicate resources and create a separate culture. The ideal would be a re-definition of mainstream provision to promote greater flexibility, responsiveness and relevance to the needs of the industry.
- Nevertheless, accommodation for work with SMEs may need to be different from that of mainstream students. Where possible, training needs to be taken out to firms rather than based at college, although this may increase the cost of the training.
- Ways of reducing the costs of training for small firms needs to be found.

## Delivering training

- While a 'high-tech' approach may be required in some circumstances, small businesses may have quite basic IT training needs.
- More local centres are needed where SME staff can have access to technology.
- Use of technology – to reach people and access learning – may provide appropriate delivery methods in the medium to long term.
- Open and distance learning approaches need to be further developed – especially telematics.
- Videoconferencing and interactive remote learning provide opportunities to deliver training and support across wide geographical areas and may go some way to overcoming the need for viable group size, thus reducing costs.
- The importance of networking and informal learning needs to be emphasised.
- Needs will change, often quite quickly, and priorities must be re-assessed regularly to ensure they are still appropriate.

# Foreword

Not a day passes without new announcements and lively media discussions on the urgency and priorities of education, training and skills for the new global economy. Similar debates characterised the dawn of the 20th century, as pioneers in automobiles and aeroplanes astonished the world with their innovation and engineering, and the courage of the human spirit. Today the latter can be daunted by the sheer pace of change, and virtual reality is real but difficult to touch. Telecommunications have revolutionised our lives. By the mid-nineties we make as many telephone calls globally in a day as we made in a year in 1983. On the eve of the 21st century, the public sector agenda and private sector business imperatives find unexpected confluence in that word 'competitiveness', wherein the external forces of globalisation and technological change are captured as a challenge to us all, whether on the shop floor, in the lecture hall or the boardroom. Increasingly, through selected partnerships and carefully crafted collaborations, the private and public goals can be met by twinning intellectual and economic strategies in this transition era.

By sharing risks and costs, and accelerating the timescales over which the transition to new skills, enhanced competencies and higher performances can be accomplished, both small and large companies can add visible value. The prospects of the individuals, the productivity of the companies and the attractiveness of the region for future investment, are all underpinned by sound education and training, research and development. Will the further education and higher education institutions be willing to experiment to match the needs for an innovative, flexible and adapted workforce in our just-in-time and on-demand society? Yes, I believe there is much shared terrain upon which we can build beyond dialogue and into action plans.

The British Aerospace Virtual University, announced a year ago and recently launched in its foundation mode, is indeed built upon educational and research partnerships. Designed as a business strategy towards international competitiveness and best practice, across all of our manufacturing, engineering and marketing activities, we are building upon our strongest asset: the knowledge, know-how and innovation of our people. As the UK's largest exporter, with partnerships and customers in 70 countries and sales exceeding £8 billion for 1997, a global perspective is essential but so is a local focus. We rely on the talent and enthusiasm of our 43,000 in the workforce, and our suppliers, over multiple geographical locations in the UK. The faculty structure of the Virtual University focuses on International Business, Engineering and Manufacturing Technology, and learning embraces NVQ to PhD. The Best Practice Centre seeks to deliver the mandate of individual and corporate learning, research technology, acquisition and strategic support across the company, its partners and suppliers.

The enormous strategic importance of our SME supplier chain is well recognised for the aerospace sector. Over 75% of the final, finished and sophisticated product, such as an Airbus 340, has come from supplier partnerships. We understand the SME challenges and barriers outlined in this FEDA publication. We also know that the sweeping technological and software changes, the need for faster delivery times, tighter costs, and higher quality will only increase in competitive importance in future years. For British Aerospace, the restructuring of the European and global aerospace industry offers a dynamic and challenging focus on the importance of its core business and its SME linkages.

SMEs and suppliers often think that they are not exposed to the turbulence of international competitiveness. That is not the case for British Aerospace, where a £2 billion prime contract won will generally mean the placing of £1.5 billion worth of subcontracts to suppliers. We do share the competitive need to win new business; therefore we all share the responsibility of shaping and sharing best practice and training with the SMEs. The roles of further education institutions and FEDA in adding value through training do indeed go 'beyond responsiveness'.

**Geraldine Kenney-Wallace**
*Managing Director and*
*Vice-Chancellor*
*The Virtual University*
*British Aerospace plc*

# 1 Introduction

In 1996 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) made up 99% of UK business in all but one industry sector: the electricity, gas and water supply sector. They provided 46% of non-government employment (DTI, 1997).[1] They are of crucial importance to the national economy. However, as Figure 1 shows, with only 42% of total turnover, their contribution to the economy falls below what might be expected, and they consistently fail to reach their full potential. There are clearly many reasons for this; the viability of the business idea, the efforts and abilities of the individuals concerned and the vagaries of the market are important factors in the success, or otherwise, of such ventures. While not all these can be remedied by appropriate training and education, it is highly likely that support for general management development, and specific skills training, could help SMEs to survive and thrive.

A major factor in the lack of fulfilment may be the tendency of SMEs to be concerned with the day-to-day demands of running their business, a short-term attitude leaving little time or resources to consider training and development.

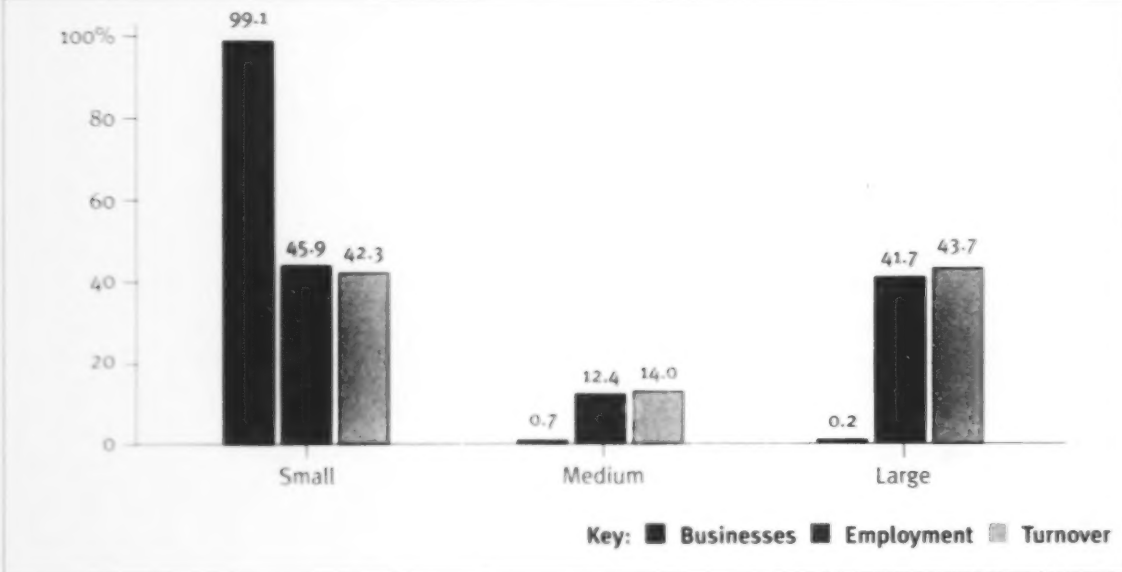
FE colleges are largely geared to catering for significant numbers of people who are content to select from a given range of courses and attend on a regular basis. In recent years, however, colleges have made significant progress in the flexibility of their response to the episodic and low-volume needs, which characterise training required by SMEs. Some, often in partnership with their TEC or Business Links, have risen to the challenge of promoting the business case for learning to their local SMEs, but there is much still to be done across the sector as a whole. This publication describes the outcomes of a FEDA project which examined this issue and indicates how colleges can successfully promote learning in SMEs.

## Finding solutions

It is against this background that the nine colleges participating in the FEDA project attempted to find solutions to the difficulties of promoting a learning culture in the SMEs in their local area. This process involved:

- identifying the SMEs in their local area (their profile, and current and potential take-up of training)

**Figure 1 Proportion of businesses, employment and turnover in small, medium and large firms at the start of 1996**




1 Department for Trade and Industry (1997) **Small and medium enterprises statistics for the United Kingdom, 1996** SME Statistics Unit DTI, July 1997

- determining strategies for marketing and promotion
- developing mechanisms to manage and deliver appropriate and cost-effective training and support.

The colleges audited their local SMEs with a questionnaire on the support strategies provided by the college and other players. They produced action plans, based on the audit results, for implementing strategic priorities. The colleges met at FEDA to share ideas and report progress. Each was also visited by FEDA education staff. The results of this activity are reported upon, often in the college's own words, in this publication.

## COLLEGES INVOLVED

Colleges were representative of the sector as a whole and included large, medium and small colleges from a range of geographical locations. The colleges which participated in the project were:

- Bishop Auckland College
- Dearne Valley College
- Grantham College
- Halton College
- Hertfordshire Regional College
- Kingsway College
- Matthew Boulton College
- Reading College
- St Austell College

***Note:*** *Small and medium-sized enterprises will be referred to as SMEs throughout this report for the sake of brevity.*

# 2 A growing sector

As the public sector has declined as a source of employment, so the proportion of the non public-sector workforce has increased, with a significant number of people employed in companies with fewer than 100 employees (see Figure 2).

SMEs are particularly important in the service sector, where they are supported by new technology, personal computers, modems and faxes. Cultural factors, franchising and management buy-outs, have put a greater emphasis on quality, meeting customer needs and flexible production methods.

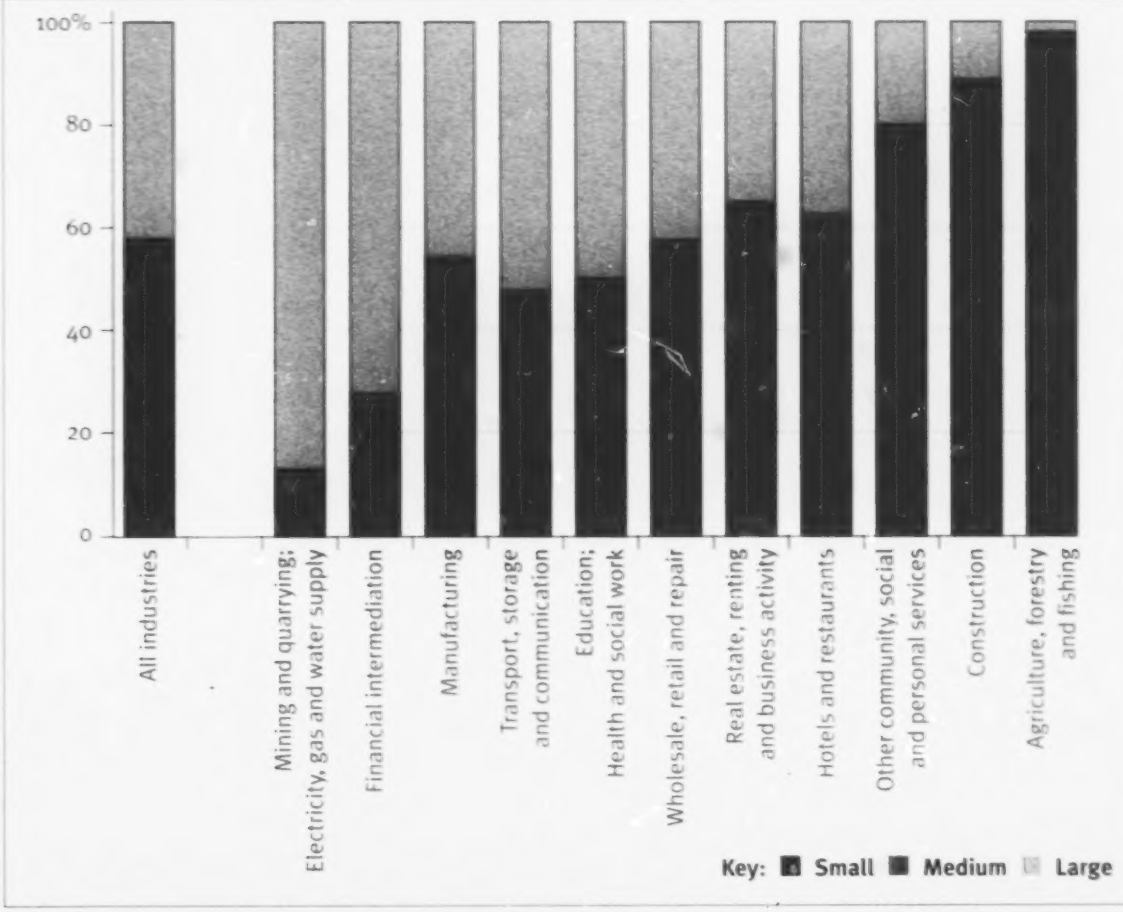
SMEs are also playing an increasingly important role in providing the most effective outlet for encouraging individual and employer growth, achieving key human resource functions, such as upskilling the workforce, and enhancing the firm's capacity to produce high quality goods and services.

The net result of these changing employment patterns is that the relative size of the SME sector in the UK has increased dramatically. Not all of these firms can be supported by public funds, and this points to a focus on targeted help from government to those companies with the management will and business potential to grow.

## Diversity – a major factor

There have been many initiatives and investigations into the needs of SMEs. One factor which emerges is that SMEs are not homogeneous but exhibit a range of needs. There are significant differences of size, sector and location. In catchment areas which include remote rural areas, diversity and difficult and costly travel are major factors.

**Figure 2 Share of employment in SMEs by industry at start of 1996**



Assumptions that SME needs are all the same could account for the lack of successful interventions. As might be expected in a sector based on entrepreneurial activity, the differences often exceed the similarities and defy mass simplification. This poses problems for providers attempting to meet these needs. Few economies of scale are possible, particularly at the small-to-micro end of the spectrum.

It is vital that colleges understand fully the various elements of the management style, the demands, skill base and operational methods of SMEs before proposing solutions to problems they articulate.

## Is size important?

'There is no universally accepted definition of a small, medium or large business' according to the DTI (1997). This was apparent throughout the FEDA project. There is very little robust data; the definition varies considerably according to the task for which the data is being used, e.g. to secure EU funding, or collection of statistics for labour market information (LMI). Turnover is often used as the principal criterion, but this can conflict with others such as the number of employees or management style (which is typically entrepreneurial or personalised). The main criteria which do not conflict tend to be economic, i.e. linking small firms with a relatively small share in their respective marketplace, and statistical, i.e. fewer than 200 employees.

Other important factors may include:

- annual turnover
- the level of role specificity and differentiation within the firm
- growth rate
- length of time established
- the norm in the area or region
- level of reserves
- supply chain issues
- whether the business is owner-managed or a subsidiary of a larger firm.

All these will affect the predisposition and capacity of the firm to participate in training and development. There is frequent mention in research of the influence of supplier chains on the take-up of training, but little hard evidence. As Geraldine Kenney-Wallace notes in her foreword, the importance of the SME supplier chain is recognised by major industries. However, the link between compliance with rigorous standards of output and the development of those working in SMEs needs to be reinforced. Companies such as BAe are clearly influential in bringing this about, but more work is needed. The combination of factors for particular SMEs may also point to the volume and type of training required and appropriate delivery methods.

The colleges involved in the project were largely concerned with the small-to-medium-sized firms, i.e. defined as those employing fewer than 50 people.

## FE colleges' mission

Providing training and support for SMEs is not generally a lucrative undertaking. The rationale for colleges, therefore, has to be linked to fulfilment of mission, the development of longer-term business relationships, and contribution to a thriving local economy, rather than immediate financial gain. The fragile financial viability of some SMEs means they may find it virtually impossible to develop the skills they need to improve their business success. Colleges can help by being aware of any sources of financial support for training, and by operating a pricing policy which takes into account ability to pay. However, it is unlikely that colleges alone can provide all the support needs of SMEs, either because of financial constraints or lack of capacity. It is therefore important that they clarify what they can do, either independently or in partnerships, and pass on requests for support which may be met by other agencies. The perception of some managers in SMEs is that too many agencies are competing to provide the same kind of support, with funding from public sources which would be better spent on direct financial support for themselves!

## SME perceptions of colleges

SMEs do not necessarily view colleges as a natural source of support services and training to improve their business performance. Many are unaware of the range and scope of programmes available at colleges and the considerably enhanced responsiveness and flexibility that further education now offers. It is crucial that the promotional and marketing strategies used by colleges focus on selling the benefits of training and other services, and their potential contribution to increased performance levels and competitiveness.

During the project, several colleges found that the volume of work brought in was relatively small compared to the number of firms targeted, and therefore revised their action plans to provide a portfolio of services which was more attractive to firms. Colleges also found it useful to maximise opportunities to bring employers into the colleges for non-training purposes, such as hosting Business Club or Chamber

of Commerce meetings. Once in the college, the range of services, equipment and training can be demonstrated to employers.

## Funding for training

Funding for training continues to be a pressing concern. Few SMEs have a significant training budget. Many have time management problems, and prioritising time for learning is relatively rare. The dominant ethos in many companies concentrates on 'fire fighting' and, in such circumstances, it is not always possible to set aside time for the identification of training needs or the delivery of training. Most are likely to be attracted by a package which includes assistance with funding and, possibly, the loan of software or hardware which will enable employees to consolidate learning in the workplace.

The ADAPT programme (see panel below), which provides support for SME development, is proving successful in getting employers to consider their training and development needs. However, the risks of such support are that it reinforces a dependency culture – in terms of subsidy for the costs of training – and masks the real costs. It is unlikely that SMEs will take the resources needed for training into account in their business plans while such subsidies are available, without the accompanying requirement to develop a training plan. Furthermore, many sources of external support require the involvement of a third party. This may interfere with the development of a sustained relationship between colleges and local firms. Support is also more than likely to be available for a pre-determined range of learning activities. The match between a company's training needs and the subsidised training they are offered may be somewhat tenuous, and employers may become disillusioned. 'Soft loans' for training from banks, tax incentives or overt but flexible subsidies may therefore be more effective in promoting SMEs' awareness of the importance of training and of committing adequate resources to secure it.

A further crucial factor is that many SME owner-managers assume direct, day-to-day involvement in commissioning and overseeing training. Also, many may profess positive attitudes to providing training opportunities, but the take-up may nevertheless be insignificant. The training function will in many cases fall behind other, seemingly more acute, management needs, such as marketing, sales, production and distribution.

***ADAPT*** is a Community Initiative funded through the European Social Fund (ESF), which supports innovative and transnational projects designed to:

- accelerate the adaptation of the workforce to industrial change
- increase the competitiveness of industry, services and commerce
- prevent unemployment by developing the workforce
- anticipate and accelerate the development of new jobs and new activities, particularly labour-intensive ones. (This includes exploiting the potential of SMEs.)

In Great Britain ADAPT gives priority to projects targeting companies with fewer than 50 employees.

# 3 Determining priorities for action

It is important that colleges are fully aware of the SME profile in their catchment area. One of the most frequent criticisms of education and training providers is their tendency to make assumptions about what people want. As the needs of SMEs vary depending on their size and disposition, it is important to identify the profile of SMEs in a particular area before deciding what support the college may be able to provide.

Colleges involved in the FEDA project undertook an audit to find out more about the SMEs in their area and considered the results of this against the college's capacity to deliver, either currently or after some development. The research instrument used by the colleges is shown in Appendix 1.

The results of this investigation were often illuminating, as shown in the Hertford Regional College example in Appendix 1.

The audit process enabled the colleges to determine their priorities for provision for SMEs in the short and longer term and to produce an action plan. Appendix 2 shows the planning pro forma used by colleges in the project.

As a result of this process, the project colleges produced action plans for the development of work with SMEs against a set of identified priorities.

***Critical issues identified by action plan:***

- promoting **Dearne Valley College**'s services and facilities, e.g. signwriting, welding, joinery, administration services
- building relationships with TECs – teacher placement
- developing relationships with local business organisations, e.g. business clubs
- develop personal approach – visits rather than mailshot or telephone selling
- carry out skills audit of staff and enter on database
- staff development
- monitoring of training effectiveness and progress through review sheets.

***Audit results***

**Dearne Valley College**'s audit revealed the extent of the SME sector in their local area.

- The mapping exercise showed (using the latest figures available) that there are approximately 125 SMEs in the Dearne Valley (as defined by the Dearne Valley Partnership). However, this area has been designated an Enterprise Zone and new firms are setting up all the time.
- Current enterprises are mainly retail and service industries, and the potential workforce consists of a high proportion of long-term unemployed, many of whom were made redundant when the heavy industries (steel and coal) were closed. The Dearne Valley area has proved popular with overseas investors, particularly Germany and, more recently, three Japanese companies.
- Part-time workers, especially women, are the fastest growing section of the workforce, and many of them are underqualified, as many as one-third having no qualifications at all.
- Many SMEs have identified a need for IT training and for the development of the core (key) skill areas.
- A recent survey of SMEs in the Dearne Valley showed that 54% of employers did not feel that the skills of the workforce were an advantage or a disadvantage to them, and that only 33% had taken part in any training.

### *Targeting industry*

*At **Kingsway College** the industries targeted for training have been identified as being Internet aware and Internet users. However, they do not have hardware or software facilities, nor do they have trained or competent Internet personnel. We believe these industries are keen to 'buy' this service from us rather than us having to 'sell' to them. As a consequence, the task of marketing to them is much easier.*

**Bishop Auckland College** decided to concentrate on a few firms they, and their partners, decided were at an optimum stage of development to be interested in training. In the main, these were firms with owner/managers and up to 10 employees.

## Working in partnership

The range of training needs of SMEs within a college catchment area is likely to be too great for a college alone to meet. There needs to be a balance between what is required and what colleges can provide. There are other players who can also support SMEs – often in ways that are difficult for colleges – and it is important not to duplicate the efforts of other legitimate players.

### *Working with TECs*

**Matthew Boulton College** chose to work with Birmingham TEC. The major advantage was that any company (provided it was based in Birmingham) which identified training as a need would be able to benefit from a subsidy of 50% of the training costs. It was felt that this would be a major incentive to anyone concerned about the likely costs.

### *Working with private sector organisations*

**Kingsway College** worked with private sector organisations as partners in an ADAPT project (see page 12). This proved to be most effective.

Progress has been greatly assisted by the creation of the innovative ADAPT Internet Training Café. This and the high quality of the training materials and training delivery provided by Hyena.co.uk – the Kingsway College private sector partner – have ensured good feedback to date from the initial beneficiary.

### *Using existing contacts*

**Bishop Auckland College** worked very closely with a range of partners, building on existing contacts.

They set up a steering group consisting of the Project Team and appropriate representatives from County Durham TEC, Business Links and Wear Valley District Council. This was to ensure that the views and activities of these organisations were taken into account and that the relevant specific expertise of the representatives informed the project.

It was considered that the project could be best informed by professionals from outside the college who work with SMEs in other capacities and with a consequent understanding of their attitudes, prob- lems and needs. All those invited to join the steering group had previously worked with one or more team members.

Working in partnership can also result in a more coherent service. Providers of support may otherwise appear to be in competition with each other – a further example, as some SMEs perceive it, of funding wasted on intermediaries, rather than on direct support for them.

### *Avoiding overload*

Most companies reported that they were inundated with information from organisations selling consultancy and training services. They were often confused or reluctant to respond, given the plethora of mailshots and circulars. The partnership of **Matthew Boulton College** with Birmingham TEC ensured some degree of co-ordination and coherence.

### *Joint bids for funding*

**Bishop Auckland College** is currently working in partnership with other providers and organisations. It has attracted funding for investment in and development of its IT resources and curriculum – Internet Access Points, setting up a video-conferencing facility, development of a software-based learning package, and establishment of a Services to Business suite comprising a Management Development Centre and an Innovation Centre with a range of computing technology-based facilities.

It is hoped that these developments will facilitate the provision of a wider range of services to our clients, specifically including SMEs.

Partnership arrangements can also result in shared resources or joint bids for funding, which may be inaccessible independently.

## Changing priorities

Even the best-laid plans may need to change.

The project colleges found this systematic and targeted approach, based on the audit results, very effective. It enabled staff to take a more strategic approach and to feel more in control of a potentially unpredictable set of demands. However, the audit is not a once-and-for-all procedure. Needs will change, often quite quickly, and priorities must be re-assessed regularly to ensure they are still appropriate.

### *Changing priorities*

**Grantham College**'s original plan, based on an assessment of SMEs in the Lincolnshire area, was to focus on the retail industry. At the start of the project a member of Grantham College staff developed a programme entitled Basic Retail Skills aimed at retail employees and designed as a basis for NVQ Levels 1 and 2 in Retail.

This programme, however, needed to be accredited by EMFEC (the East Midlands Further Education Council) before it could be offered to clients, a process which took a considerable amount of time. Accreditation was granted in December 1996 but the relevant member of staff left Grantham College at the beginning of January 1997, and so the marketing of the programme did not continue as effectively.

After looking at other areas a number of projects currently linking SMEs to Grantham College were identified.

# 4 Promotion and marketing

Informing SMEs about the training and support on offer is clearly an important prerequisite to its take-up. There are many effective ways of promoting the take-up of learning in SMEs and, generally speaking, more than one method will be required. Most effective marketing strategies emphasise the benefits to the business, rather than exhorting employers to train for its own sake.

### *Focusing on flexibility*

*I envisage the promotion and marketing programme will be developed during August ready to be launched in early September. We will focus on the benefits organisations will gain by introducing effective training.We recognise that the retail sector is a very busy environment with small profit margins and very little spare time for formal training. Therefore, we will underline the flexibility of our training programmes and arrange for sessions to be short and focused.(Grantham College).*

### *Distance learning via the Internet*

At **Bishop Auckland College**, determining priorities proved to be very useful in focusing the marketing strategy.

The main priority identified in the Action Plan was to target 5-6 SMEs in the rural part of the College's TTL (Travel to Learn) area in order to determine the potential for delivering learning programmes via learning packages available on CD-ROM or via the Internet. It was agreed to approach SMEs which appeared to be on the threshold of expansion and for whom this type of learning might, therefore, be particularly appropriate.

There is little doubt that direct personal contact is the most effective method to promote the take-up of training by SMEs. It is also the method they prefer.

### *Direct contact*

**Bishop Auckland** noted that questionnaire responses and discussions during the initial visit indicated in every case that the company did not consider mail shots effective. They preferred the initial telephone call, and 'on spec' personal calls to appointments made in advance.

**St Austell College** also reported that a range of strategies is required with an emphasis on personal contact:

*The marketing activity is driven by the programme being offered and we attempt to approach potential customers through a variety of methods. All methods have proven successful. However, the most successful, is the direct contact between employer and the College.*

While such relationship-building clearly produces long-term results, the pressure on staff time makes it very resource intensive. The college contact becomes an adviser and problem-solver. However, once the relationship is established, it is possible to use other methods, such as a postal questionnaire, more effectively – especially when they are supplemented by a quick telephone call. As Bishop Auckland College found, this often produces very useful information (see page 16).

### *Questionnaire-based information*

**Bishop Auckland College**'s analysis of the questionnaire responses from employers indicated that the following elements are critical to successful dealing with SMEs:

- availability of computers and of appropriate software to meet the perceived training need
- flexibility of delivery in terms of location and duration of sessions
- costs – none of the participating companies has a training budget, and although they preferred customised training to that leading to a qualification, lack of funding is a problem
- problems of time management and prioritisation to facilitate arrangements for time set aside for learning
- level of IT development – only one of the companies is on the Internet
- caution – all indicated that they would find it very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of any training in terms of direct benefit to their business.

Such information enables providers to tailor support to particular needs. SMEs may also have their awareness of the need for training enhanced by being asked for such information. However, even the best prepared strategies often appear to produce modest results, as Matthew Boulton College discovered.

### *Disappointing results*

**Matthew Boulton College** sent out a mailshot to 580 Birmingham-based print and graphic arts companies employing fewer than 250 staff. The mailshot invited companies to attend a launch to highlight the link between investment in training and increased competitiveness.

Companies were also invited to take advantage of a 50% subsidy towards the cost of any training undertaken. This subsidy was made available through Birmingham TEC's allocation of European Social Fund Objective 2 funding to develop and increase skill levels within Birmingham-based SMEs.

Two weeks after the mailshot, all the companies were telephoned by College Admission Unit staff. By the date of the launch event, only 15 companies had confirmed their attendance. Seventy-eight companies sent apologies and said they would be interested in receiving further information. Twenty-seven invitations were returned with 'address unknown'. The remaining companies either did not return their call or stated that they were not interested. All responses were logged.

Unfortunately only three employers turned up for the event, one of them over 45 minutes late.

Undaunted, the college sent an information pack containing details of the Skills Investment programme to all those who had either apologised for not coming or who had said they were coming and did not. These were followed up with phone calls to check that the information had been received.

Similarly, at Dearne Valley College Open Evenings organised for the TECs were successful but an Open Evening for employers was poorly attended.

### *Poor attendance*

The aim of **Dearne Valley College**'s Open Evening was to promote a Modern Apprentice Mentoring Programme available free to local companies. It was marketed through the RCCTE mailshot (250) to companies which are involved with the Modern Apprenticeship programme and other SMEs with a workforce of 50 plus. Personal follow-up telephone calls were made to companies with which Dearne Valley College was involved (20) and this resulted in one more attendance and seven requests for further details. The response from these strategies was:

- acceptance **9**
- apologies **2**
- actual attendance **5** – all companies which already had close working relations with the college.

Obviously this response was extremely disappointing although there was very favourable take-up from the companies that did attend.

## Reviewing approaches to marketing

Since the disappointing events on the previous page, many of the colleges involved in the project have reviewed their marketing and promotion strategies.

The key to future success may lie in the identification of a named contact, who is readily available and able to talk sensibly to companies.

One of the major findings to emerge from the follow-up telephone calls was that many of the company representatives spoken to had not seen or heard of the invitation to the launch event. If nothing else, the project has at least established a named contact in each company for future reference.

### *Reviewing advertising*

**Grantham College**'s past experience has shown that advertising courses in local papers has not produced the desired level of response and this has resulted in a re-think of marketing and promotional strategy.

### *Information gathering*

For **Matthew Boulton College**, one of the most valuable aspects of gathering information has been establishing a point of contact with each company. One problem with mailshots is that they do not always 'hit' the right person. This was further endorsed by the many telephone calls in which respondents claimed not to have seen the original mailing.

Other improvements include a new design for the promotion of short courses and full-cost recovery activity. The format has been based on the need to produce short runs of publicity for bespoke training programmes at very short notice. The college has also improved the layout of its twice-yearly magazine, *Business Line*, distributed to all employers on the college's database.

## Changing perceptions

Many SMEs do not automatically think of their local college when considering their training concerns. As Reading College observes (see below), this may call for a wide range of measures.

### *Reading College's parallel strategies*

Following the SME profiling, we set out, as a priority, to change the sector's perception of our competence to deliver business solutions. This was achieved through two parallel strategies: one to promote the Technology Centre as a 'business-focused centre', and the other to use peer group marketing.

To demonstrate our expertise in the design and delivery of business improvement programmes, we devised an 'anywhere, any time' training programme. Implementation of the two parallel strategies demanded:

- positioning the Technology Centre within the business supply chain
- using educational technology
- developing a close SME–Technology Centre relationship

The following activities were identified as the vehicle for implementing the strategies:

- A technology consortium was formed to sustain industry's interest in the college as a whole; seven employers joined. It was publicised as a demonstration of the Technology Centre's intention to align its resources and operations to the benefit of SMEs.
- Using a technology-audit: fax-backs demonstrated a customer-driven operation. A technology audit form was designed and posted to 130 local SMEs of which 65 responded. A summary of the audit was then sent to all 65.
- *Technology Brief*, a Filofax-cut information sheet was published on various aspects of applied technology suitable for the SME sector. It not only re-emphasised the technical and business knowledge available in the college but also partially redefined our 'FE' image. It resulted in an increase in the technological level of the queries received by the Technology Centre.
- Establishing local technology and business 'clubs'. Plans are in progress for an SME-focused Business Club, Automation Club and Quality Club. The main challenge is the varied interests and dynamics of the SMEs. Maintaining the interest of enough SMEs to make the clubs financially viable has proved a major task.
- Demonstrating the advantages of the membership of the Technology Consortium was achieved by obtaining training funds for the employees' development programme of one of the consortium members.

Matthew Boulton College similarly found that firms assumed that FE colleges were inflexible:

> *Most companies welcomed the follow-up phone call, and many were surprised at the range of services on offer. College promotion has traditionally focused on selling courses rather than the benefits of training and other services. The companies contacted were in the main unaware that training was delivered in any other way but day-release and evening provision.*

Raising the profile of the college and its capacity to provide support may require ingenuity. Kingsway College aimed to develop potential partnerships between the college and local companies.

### *Potential partnerships*

'Towards Historic Clerkenwell Association' had developed by January 1996 to constitute a network of 90 companies based in the creative/media and cultural sectors in the London EC1 locality of Clerkenwell.

The success of a subsequent ADAPT project ASTRANET in reaching its target audience was due to:

- the pre-existence and use of this association, which was already familiar with **Kingsway College** and proved very receptive to the promotional activity of ASTRANET
- the co-operation and support of the Finsbury Business Centre, which represents nearly 70 companies, many of which were encouraged to take up the opportunity of the Internet training course once the director (a steering board member) had become convinced of its value.

## CHANGING NEEDS

Changes to the employment base within sectors require different strategies.

> *Until recently, Grantham College has been unable to target engineering companies effectively although this sector has SMEs with a variety of training needs. The college has now recruited an engineer who has made contact with some engineering training managers and has begun identifying suitable training programmes.*

SMEs may themselves be confused by changing demands, and welcome advice and guidance from people they view as speaking authoritatively on key issues in their sector. Information days, where external speakers are also involved, can be valuable marketing activities.

### *Information as marketing*

A recent information day for representatives from engineering companies provided an opportunity to promote **Grantham College**'s services to industry. An EMTA representative outlined new NVQ programmes and assessment requirements. Delegates were given the opportunity to look around the college engineering department and received invitations to join the Engineering Advisers Committee which provides companies with a forum for discussing engineering training opportunities and associated developments. As a result of the recession, membership of this committee had dwindled to only one or two representatives from the industry. Following Grantham College's initiative, five more companies have been recruited. Their input will enable the college to tailor training programmes to suit individual company requirements. The college is currently marketing a number of short courses such as CAD Appreciation, CNC and IEE Wiring Regulations as well as NVQ programmes.

At Dearne Valley College, the new college building was itself a draw to the public generally, and later provided a useful venue for meetings of small business clubs, attended by college representatives.

### *Facilities and venues*

The opening of the new **Dearne Valley College** in September 1996 provided an excellent opportunity to promote the facilities now available. Open days were advertised in the local press and the Industrial Liaison Co-ordinator and the individual sections' Industrial Liaison Representatives contacted local companies in by telephone and by mailshots, followed by visits as appropriate. Launches were organised to promote specific vocational areas.

## TELESALES TECHNIQUES

Many of the colleges in the project used telesales techniques to make initial contact. However, without professional training, this may not produce the expected results. Halton College found that employing specialists was most effective.

> *A professional telemarketing company was employed on an occasional basis to market the centre facilities and services to SMEs. This was successful in leading to appointments for centre staff to visit companies, which provided the opportunity to outline some of the changes that have taken place since incorporation.*
>
> *Twelve days of telesales activity resulted in contacts with over 600 companies. Of those, 150 made appointments for centre staff to visit and a further 28 requested information.*

This is not to say that staff with specialist subject knowledge should not be involved in promotion and marketing, but that their expertise may be more useful at a later stage.

> *During visits to SMEs following the telesales contact, staff at Halton College were able to explain the changes that have taken place at the college since incorporation: longer opening hours, drop-in facilities, flexible delivery patterns and a more customer-orientated culture.*

## Drop-in facilities

Halton College also capitalised on their drop-in facility, with appropriate preparation of staff and materials to ensure that the needs of people employed by SMEs were reflected in the provision on display.

Dearne Valley College used existing contacts with employer groups to market to the college's capacity to deliver training.

***Drop-in facilities***

**Within Halton College**, groups of SME employees were identified and lecturers asked to introduce project work using the software available in the centre. Employees were then encouraged to use the drop-in facility to undertake and complete projects. This in turn raised awareness of the software and applications in the centre.

Awareness-raising with current students employed by SMEs was also considered important for successful delivery of the project. Awareness sessions were planned where specific groups such as personnel officers and trade union representatives, were introduced to the new technologies and range of software available in the centre. This formed part of a pump-priming exercise in marketing the centre.

***Links with employer groups***

**Dearne Valley College** had originally considered setting up a group to disseminate the college's potential for training. However, it was decided that the wide variety of groups already in operation would serve this purpose. These groups included:

- **The Dearne Valley Small Business Club** – a very pro-active business club meeting monthly. The college is now a member, and a representative from the Industrial Liaison Team attends each monthly meeting. The college has helped to obtain funding for focus groups to look at security, IT, marketing, and education and training. A member of the college staff has joined each of these groups – which include representatives from the TECs and from local businesses. The focus group will make recommendations to the club on key issues and actions to be taken by the club. The college also hosted one of the meetings at the new site, which gave members the opportunity to meet staff and to look around the facilities.
- **Rawmarsh Business Group** – Rawmarsh is a small suburb of Rotherham with two small shopping centres and an industrial trading estate. The Local Authority Community Action Group is encouraging the development of the Business Group, and it is hoped that attendance at their meetings will help to promote the college and offer assistance in the development of training plans.
- **Dearne Valley Training Managers Association** is attended by representatives from local training providers, members of the Dearne Valley Partnership, Careers Service and the local TECs. They discuss local issues concerning the training and development of people in the Dearne Valley, from pupils in school to business development. Outside speakers are invited to meetings and make presentations on specific matters which may have been piloted in other areas of the country.

## USING COLLEGE SERVICES

Calling on the general marketing function of the college may be a useful part of specific marketing for SMEs. As St Austell College discovered:

> *The college has recently appointed a new marketing co-ordinator who will be driving forward a new marketing policy for the college. The emphasis will not just be on the promotion of our activities but will encompass research into student attitudes and local needs. The Management Centre will continue to co-ordinate employer research.*

This move to secure the involvement of college mainstream services is also reflected in Matthew Boulton College's plans.

### *Marketing to employers*

The FEDA project has helped **Matthew Boulton College**'s Admissions Unit to take a more proactive role in the direct marketing of college programmes and services to employers. Before this project, the unit had mainly been occupied with enquiries, processing applications and enrolments.

The Admissions Unit now also records all forms of employer liaison activity and updates the college's employer database accordingly. An Employer Liaison Committee has been established to co-ordinate employer liaison activities across all areas of the college. As well as promoting college programmes, the committee receives monthly reports on the levels and nature of liaison activity, including full-cost recovery income.

# 5 Designing and delivering learning programmes

Delivering appropriate learning programmes to SMEs is not easy. With diverse needs and few opportunities for economies of scale, the work is often expensive and time-consuming. That said, many of the colleges rose to the challenge and developed programmes which proved to be very valuable, despite a variety of problems:

- The lead-in time in the development of programmes is greater than originally anticipated. Most of this work will be going on during the next few months leading to programmes being delivered in the next academic year. (St Austell College)
- Our experience suggests that short programmes delivering practical training which help employees to work more efficiently are considered more useful by employers than long-term courses which lead to national qualifications. (Halton College)
- A diverse range of software is used. Few small companies have a computer they can dedicate totally to the learning process.
- Few small companies have a suitable learning area and even fewer have a training budget.
- The wide variety of roles carried out by a small number of employees precludes buying in training for groups and makes training (customised, ideally), extremely expensive.
- Distance from college for SMEs in rural areas is inconvenient.
- Time for the identification of training needs, and provision of training, is not set aside, due to the dominant business ethic of 'firefighting'. (Bishop Auckland College)

Patterns in participation generally in FE are changing as St Austell College discovered (see below).

***Changing patterns of participation***

Research by Devon & Cornwall TEC 1993–5, in Opportunities for Growth, has shown a declining demand for the traditional FE day-release programmes and an increase in open and distance learning.

| Method of learning | % of employers | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 |
| Day release | 83 | 58 | 54 |
| Block release | 29 | 27 | 20 |
| Evening course | 25 | 28 | 27 |
| Weekend course | 19 | 19 | 12 |
| Open learning | 21 | 25 | 35 |
| Flexible learning | 18 | 26 | 17 |
| Distance learning | 20 | 23 | 26 |

Being aware of these issues, the colleges took a range of actions to help enable SMEs to participate in training.

### *Short course prospectus*

**Grantham College** is about to launch a short course prospectus covering a range of subjects, from management development to health and safety, as well as a range of courses aimed at the care sector, engineering and manufacturing companies.

These courses should prove attractive to SMEs, as they allow for individual participation. This keeps the costs down and enables participants to exchange views and ideas with representatives from other organisations.

## Diversity of software and training needs

The range of software used by SMEs, and the often low level of competence in using it, pose difficulties.

### *Meeting diverse needs*

**Halton College** observed that providing training for SMEs is challenging because of the diversity of training required. A wide range of software packages are in use in SMEs. These are not necessarily the more widely used packages and consequently college staff may not be able to support training on these products.

Colleges need to develop new learning materials or adapt existing packages to meet these diverse needs effectively (see Halton College's selection of flexible learning materials in the next column).

### *Flexible learning materials*

In order to keep the delivery costs to a minimum **Halton College** planned the following courses around bought-in flexible learning materials:

- software evaluation: a comparison of the features of Lotus SmartSuite and Microsoft Office Professional
- introduction to the Windows Operating Environment
- an introduction to Windows and Word 6
- Windows and Word 6 (Further Features)
- Internet for Business
- Internet/Videoconferencing Workshops
- introduction to Windows 3.1
- ntroduction to Windows 3.11 and AmiPro
- seminar on Advanced Business Communications
- NVQ Level 2 – Install IT Products
- low cost Microsoft and Lotus applications
- computer technical training for SMEs

## Flexible solutions

Releasing staff from SMEs for training is a major concern for many firms. A range of flexible solutions, based on short modular provision, is required.

### *Short course delivery*

Among the companies that enquired about what **Halton College** can offer SMEs there is still a clear preference for short-course delivery. Half-day, one-day and two-day courses with possible follow-up using the same delivery pattern are requested.

Some companies have opted to use the drop-in facility on an hourly rate. Employees from these are accessing the centre for training in Windows 3.11 Operating System and AmiPro Word Processing; others receiving CAD training. This is on the basis of self-learning, using open learning materials and support from learning support assistants or lecturing staff, depending on the specific training requirements.

Whatever the flexible approach, the importance of tutor support, either in person or via telematic links remains. This personal contact – valued in the marketing process – is equally essential during delivery of training.

However, even with a level of flexibility, more pressing concerns may over-ride the commitment to training, as Reading College observes on the next page.

### *Displacing priorities*

**Reading College** found that out of seven consortium members, four agreed to consider a training proposal to The Royal Academy of Engineering. On the completion of training needs analysis, three of the SMEs re-allocated the training budget to other more pressing projects.

Or, even more difficult to cope with, SMEs may pull out of an arrangement for training at the last minute.

On several occasions training sessions at **Grantham College** have been cancelled by companies at the last minute because of more pressing commitments. This leads to a lack of continuity in the programme and frustration for both trainer and employee.

## IT-BASED SOLUTIONS

In the medium-to-longer term, IT-based solutions, which enable learning to take place from the workplace or the home, may offer a further viable alternative.

### *Using remote learning*

**Halton College** has observed that release of employees for training is proving difficult for some SMEs. The current training model relies heavily on the release of employees, in working hours, to attend courses. The introduction of new technologies which allow remote access to the facilities of the college is something that must be addressed. The use of the Internet and videoconferencing facilities to allow employees to access training and education courses from the workplace and from their homes must be explored and developed by the college for the future.

## LOCAL CENTRES

There are currently many initiatives aimed at increasing the use of IT by SMEs. Here again, a partnership approach – particularly when linked to funding streams – may prove to be most effective, as Grantham College notes.

### *Using local centres*

**Grantham College**'s biggest successes have been in IT: a number of their current projects are managed in co-operation with other colleges and organisations.

One such venture is the Sleaford Pride Project which has now been running for 12 months. Aimed at supporting people and organisations either living or based in the Sleaford area, it is designed to improve the competitiveness of industry and commerce. Particular focus is placed on providing training in IT, Customer Service, Skills for Small Businesses, New Opportunities for Women, and Childcare. This has led to new businesses starting up in the Sleaford area as well as providing training for employees in local nurseries and play groups, a volunteer bureau and a firm of solicitors. It has also raised the profile of Grantham College in the Sleaford area and there are plans to expand the range of programmes on offer from the training rooms at the Sleaford Foyer.

The college is also involved in a Flexitech Project to promote videoconferencing to SMEs in its area. This TEC-funded project is being undertaken jointly by Grantham College, North Lincolnshire College and Boston College. To encourage companies to join the scheme, each college can offer free installation to seven organisations, saving £1,000 per company.

Initiatives which provide telematic centres are clearly of great interest, particularly when located in remote areas.

### *Interactive remote learning*

**St Austell College** is exploring interactive remote learning using videoconferencing. It is now investigating use of the Internet as a learning medium and taking part in a Regional Challenge-funded project called RATIO. This aims to establish 40 telematic centres in the more remote areas of Devon and Cornwall to provide learning opportunities to people who traditionally have found it difficult to travel to their local college. The centres are equipped with videoconferencing, Internet and satellite, and serviced through a federation of local FE and HE establishments. It is very early days and therefore no conclusions can be drawn as to their effectiveness.

The college has also been involved in a similar project providing training through earth-based communications and multimedia to Bude, a town on the North Cornwall coast some 40 miles from the nearest college. The new technologies are well accepted by the students, but research is still being carried out to establish the long-term effects of such training.

However, even if the technology for remote access and flexible learning is available, people unused to working in this way will require support to develop new learning skills. Equally, college staff may need to develop learning packages and new techniques to maximise the benefits of telematic modes of learning. Ways of supporting the learner, when direct contact with tutors or peers is minimal, need to be developed across the whole FE sector.

## FINDING A NICHE

St Austell College, like many other colleges, discovered a niche training requirement linked to changes in working practice and legislation, and associated with supply chain relationships.

### *Specialist qualifications*

**St Austell College** has developed programmes leading to the NVQ in Waste Management for local companies. Establishing this required the following:

- Preliminary discussions: The original contact came through South West Water's Training Officer. We spent several hours with him investigating the opportunities and requirements of the qualification.
- Programme planning: We developed a team of consultant, trainers and assessors who have driven the programme forward to its current state of being 'delivery ready'.
- Centre approval from City & Guilds and WAMITAB (Waste Management Industry Training & Advisory Board) proved to be a lengthier process than for other qualifications because everything is still in development.
- Staff development: The college's policy is to invest in the training of its staff and address any training development issue. Because we use industrial experts we have provided 'training the trainer' courses for them. Further needs are certain to be identified and resolved.
- Delivery of training: The training team have delivered the first programme. The complexity of the content requires block delivery with on-site assessment.
- Review and evaluation: We have a continual review and evaluation process for all our programmes based around regular team meetings.

Forty candidates took part in the pilot. There has been continual review of the training and assessment and we can now offer this outside South West Water.

The development costs of such a programme are significant, and the returns may not be evident in the short term. However, where pump-priming funding is available, such concerns can be minimised.

### *Development funding*

*We had a distinct advantage in the preparation of this course as we were able to obtain development funding from South West Water. This has been taken into account in the charges for the actual training but it did enable us to develop the course properly.*

*This is normally a severe problem for FE establishments due to lack of resources, both people and financial, and is a contributing factor in the lack of development of longer-term learning programmes.*
***(St Austell College)***

## FUNDING FOR TRAINING

Funding for training remains an unresolved issue. Many SMEs have little or no resources for training and it may be equally important to promote an investment culture, i.e. a training budget as an essential part of a business plan. In the short term, however, SMEs may need their awareness of the benefits of training raised to the 'bottom line' first. Colleges can assist by informing SMEs about funding sources – including FEFC – which may be appropriate without being company specific.

Although this would carry the added advantage of qualifications for staff, many firms are very anti-NVQ, or need only parts of it and the absence of a unitised funding regime makes that less attractive in economic terms. Equally, many firms fear that their staff will be poached after being trained – particularly if it leads to a qualification. The absence of a training levy, or some other lever to stimulate demand, is also unhelpful.

Nevertheless, colleges are attempting to provide support within SMEs' budgets.

### *European project funding*

Funding is a critical issue for most companies contacted. Success in promoting education and training is more likely if employers are offered a package including assistance with funding. **Dearne Valley College** has recently been successful in obtaining ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) project funding which will enable it to offer 18 hours of IT training to local SMEs. This will be enhanced by the loan of a computer and appropriate software for several months so that they can continue to consolidate their learning in the workplace. Future plans include Internet links with industry so that much of the learning and contact with the college can be carried out on-line.

Take-up of technology-based provision may take time to develop but, when carefully targeted, is often successful. SMEs would also benefit from an easy guide to what support is available in the area and what colleges may be able to provide. Bishop Auckland College held a short and very successful course on cyber skills and a short guide on technology projects in the North East has been produced.

Taking part in the FEDA project also proved to be beneficial in terms of future bids for funding.

### *Delivering technology to manufacturing companies*

**Bishop Auckland College** reports that 'experiences' and 'recommendations' from this project were used in a successful bid to the Further Education Competitiveness Fund. The initiative, Engineering 2000, will develop a Mobile Technology Unit, Mobile Video Conferencing Unit, and a Multimedia Unit. These will be used to deliver technology course to manufacturing companies, with a high degree of input from companies. Many, if not all, of the recommendations in the report will be implemented to ensure the success of Engineering 2000.

More detailed case studies of successful provision for particular clients are attached as Appendix 3.

# 6 Management issues

Meeting the diverse needs of SMEs is not easy. For good reasons, colleges function most efficiently when providing regular and systematic learning to significant groupings of people. Such arrangements maximise economies of scale and enable administration and preparation costs to be rationalised. The difficulty which all colleges now face is how to respond to the small-scale episodic involvement in learning which typifies a lifelong learning culture. The issue of providing learning for SMEs brings this to the fore, but it is a symptom of a wider imperative to develop flexible responses to individual needs.

If resources were unlimited, total flexibility could doubtless be achieved. However, such resources are beyond the public purse, and individuals and SMEs are unlikely, or unwilling, to be able to pay the true cost of fully customised provision. Nevertheless, the challenge presented by the demands of provision for SMEs may help colleges to develop their flexibility within achievable limits.

## Staff perceptions

One of the main difficulties encountered by project colleges was the attitude of mainstream teaching staff. They were not entirely negative, but they perceived the work as less important than those charged with securing it.

Obtaining consistency in staff involvement proved to be difficult.

***Staff liaison***

**At Dearne Valley College management and co-ordination of this work was undertaken through Industrial Liaison Team meetings, attended by representatives from each section. However, sections tended to send a different representative to each meeting. It was emphasised that to ensure consistency and optimise progress, a named person should attend all meetings.**

Increased efficiency and downsizing in colleges have left very little slack in the system to meet unpredicted requests for training. It is hardly surprising that staff concentrate, in the main, on their regular timetabled classes. However, this situation needs to be acknowledged and managed, either by having on call a band of trusted part-time staff who can operate on a just-in-time basis, or by freeing up the curriculum of regular provision so that staff can set independent learning activities for students and thus secure time for short periods to work with SMEs. The benefits to mainstream provision, in terms of greater relevance to the world of work, awareness of a business culture, and more up-to-date teaching materials, need to be emphasised.

Initially, this flexible approach needs to be developed in curriculum areas which are more willing, or able, to take part.

***Flexible practice***

**Some sections of Dearne Valley College do operate in an extremely flexible manner and are able to accommodate trainees in whichever mode of attendance suits them. Problems occur where sections provide traditional college-based training in classes of 12–20 students on a regular attendance basis. However, meetings are held to discuss any problems and new working practices developed or current ones amended.**

## Developing skills

The skills staff require to operate in this way may be different from those practised in day-to-day delivery. Colleges should ensure that key staff are updated systematically. Developing good relationships with employers may increase the opportunities to try out new techniques and equipment, which will inform mainstream provision as well as company-specific work.

Halton College took matching staff skills to the requirements of company-specific work very seriously and suggested that securing a pool of trainers was worth considering.

### *Separate provision*

**Halton College** concluded that the training requirements of SMEs can be very demanding, particularly when dealing with practitioners in a specific application. Teaching staff now have many different roles and responsibilities, so do not always have the time to learn the full range of facilities available with modern applications and software packages. The expertise and flexibility of training demanded by companies require separate provision from mainstream and a wide range of professionals – not exclusively lecturers or teaching staff. It is important to match job skills to staff skills, which suggests that a pool of part-time trainers with specific skills would be more suitable for this kind of work. This option is now under consideration.

## INTEGRATED VERSUS DISCRETE APPROACHES

Many colleges have set up independent provision (discrete business units) to meet company-specific needs, but they do sometimes find that this limits their potential provision and also requires parallel systems, such as marketing, enrolment, quality assurance, etc. It presents less of a challenge to the institution, but may also reduce the general increase in flexibility required by all learners and the return on the investment to the main college programme. As Bishop Auckland College notes, there are many spin-offs to working with SMEs, not all of which are directly related to customised provision.

In the most successful colleges, the 'front end' or threshold-services interface with clients is already geared towards individual clients' needs. A good alternative is to operate a specialist sales and services section for business customers. This has the advantages of creating positive first impressions of the college and highlighting the emphasis placed on individual needs while using the resources of the whole college for delivery – usually the most expensive cost of all.

Many business units within colleges are able to operate at a net profit. However, the emphasis on maximising return on the investment may make the SME market – particularly at the small end of medium-sized – too difficult to be sufficiently profitable. Furthermore, staffing business units with a sufficiently broad base of trainers to meet a wide range of needs is very expensive – particularly if this duplicates an under-used resource in mainstream provision.

### *Working with SMEs*

**Bishop Auckland College** noted the following spin offs:

- One company updated its computer system following advice given on the first visit.
- Training and advice on Windows '95 and Internet, demonstration of hydraulic/pneumatic software, advice on AutoCAD have been provided for SMEs.
- An SME employee joined a mainstream college course.
- A company owner has joined the college Business Centre Steering Group.
- Computerised forms have been developed for college-wide use.
- A Web page has been developed, providing information on college services, etc.
- Development of tourism literature has taken place.
- Links have been made with other companies.
- College-business partnerships have been enhanced.

Reciprocity of staff expertise and information is a vital component of 'whole-college' approaches to flexible provision. St Austell College used a staff awareness-raising exercise to bring mainstream staff into contact with SMEs (see page 28).

Important issues, such as speed of response and a 'professional' air, may be more difficult to achieve within an integrated approach, but they are becoming equally important in regular provision. Efforts to improve the quality of service for SMEs will benefit the whole college.

### *First impressions*

**Kingsway College** found that small companies are quick to judge the quality of experience and presentation of the training facility; staff appearance and general demeanour both contribute to first impressions. The value of professional trainers is that this is fully accepted and complied with. The problem then is to spread good practice to more traditional, mainstream areas of practice, not just to rely on outside experts.

Incentives to individual sections for taking part in this work need to be considered.

### *Responding to requests for training*

The St Austell College Management Centre was set up initially to meet the needs of local industry and commerce. The college was having difficulty responding promptly to requests for training and had limited staff resources to develop new programmes. It has since built a solid reputation for being able to meet most requests for training from local businesses. To achieve the correct skills mix, the Management Centre has built up its trainer base of experienced, qualified practitioners and currently has over 120 consultants on its books. It was because of this expertise that the Management Centre was asked to assist the college with their research activities.

Information obtained – the research covered the following areas:-

| Occupational Area | Target | Achieved |
|---|---|---|
| Electro-mechanical engineering | 10 | 0 |
| Electronics/information technology | 10 | 28 |
| Training for travel agents | 20 | 2 |
| Hospitality and catering | 30 | 30 |
| Foreign language training for business | 10 | 40 |
| NVQ playwork | 20 | 10 |
| Professional training for classroom assistants | 25 | 12 |
| East Cornwall and South Devon businesses | 50 | 50 |
| **Totals** | **175** | **172** |

These visits were carried out by approximately 12 staff from college mainstream, and the information gathered was fairly comprehensive.

**Better relationships:** The visiting staff have done their work well and enhanced the image of the college with local employers. The information gathered has not always resulted in opportunities for new programme development but has often indicated a lack of interest in areas we had thought were wanted. Two examples of this have been the apparent lack of commitment to the HNC – Early Childhood Years research carried out by the HE department, and the NVQ Playwork research.

**Changes in practice:** The heads of faculties decided that visits should now be one of the core activities of the department, as workloads permit. The Management Centre will continue to monitor them and ensure that the importance of the process is cascaded to all staff, especially in the faculties that did not participate.

### *Incentives through targets for income*

It has been suggested to management that incentives should be offered to sections through targets for income, and that benefits from a pro-active approach to industrial liaison are fed directly into sections rather than college central budget.

## LEADERSHIP FROM MANAGERS

Given that provision of this sort is not generally very lucrative, its relation to the college mission is of vital importance. Clear leadership from college managers and a commitment to engaging SMEs in learning are required to ensure that solutions to management problems are found. This may ensure that a whole college approach is employed – problems shared and solved together – regardless of management structures.

How individual colleges organise this function to maximise efficiency and responsiveness will clearly depend on the size of the organisation, the make-up of its mainstream provision, the complexities of the local SME base and the nature of its competition. Whatever structures are put in place, the ultimate aim of the provision needs to be understood and agreed by all college staff.

# 7 Conclusions and issues

## Why bother?

Given the competing pressures on FE, and the difficulty of meeting the needs of SMEs and stimulating their take-up of training, it would be understandable if colleges decided to leave the SME market to other providers. Unlike more lucrative company-specific work, returns on investment are often limited and the staff/time implications are considerable. However, such decisions would remove a very significant resource both for providing training and for developing a learning culture in SMEs.

Colleges which persevere in their efforts to work with SMEs may benefit in the longer term from very good relationships with their local businesses and enhanced standing in the community. They may also be seen by many SMEs as their preferred supplier, which could in turn lead to more business and more learners. Partnerships and Accords with other providers and agencies, such as Business Link, may enable support packages to be put together, capitalising on each partner's strengths rather than on competition. This could ensure that costs are kept within manageable limits for all concerned.

## A wide range of support

Support is available for SME development – ranging from advice on start-up and business plans to TEC subsidies of 50% for specified training. The colleges involved in the FEDA project were aware of these and helped many SMEs to exploit them. However, gaining access to these can often be bewildering: the support may not be quite what is required; advice on how it may be adapted may not be forthcoming; and returns are unlikely to be apparent in the short term. For some SMEs struggling with a cash-flow crisis, incentives to train are thus unlikely to be successful.

## Readiness for training

Gauging the optimum time for a firm to take part in training or development can be more accurately achieved when the college already has a relationship with the local SMEs. The time invested in developing this relationship will ultimately pay off. This will require a listening approach, together with an awareness of what is required to support the SME's business as well as what the college can offer.

## Below-the-line marketing

As the project colleges discovered, initial approaches from telesales staff are often very effective. The call centre approach being used, for example, in the North East UfI pilot, must be followed up with personal contact and an individual approach to customer care. Trained telesales staff may be brought in on a contracts basis as required, or the college's own staff could be trained in the techniques. Whatever the method used, it is vital that the staff concerned are aware of what the college can offer and have identified key contacts for the next stage in the process. A quick advance from enquiry to personal contact is important.

## Organisational issues

The nature of the college and the context in which it operates will dictate the way in which the service to SMEs is managed and implemented. The commentary from project colleges indicates the plethora of issues to consider when developing this service. However, these issues are not entirely specific to promoting learning in SMEs. They are also related to a wider aim of securing a flexible response to individual needs within a limited budget. The challenge of such mass customisation is to ensure that a personalised service can be provided from a stable mainstream provision. Colleges which are seriously attempting to work with SMEs may find that this experience pays dividends in the movement towards inclusivity and widening participation.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Audit research tool and example

### Audit research tool

The college research into their local SME profile investigated the following:

- the general characteristics of SMEs in the college Travel to Learn area
  - sizes of firms and approximate numbers in each category
  - geographical location, distance from college sites
  - type of premises
  - sector and nature of business
  - profile of employees (e.g. age, gender, qualifications)
  - recent possible changes in: nature of business, processes, uses of technology etc.
  - links to supplier chains
  - length of time in business
  - other
- the kind of training they may require (off the shelf or bespoke)
  - specialist/general vocational
  - high/low technology
  - for individuals/groups
  - regular/episodic
  - high/low cost
  - basic literacy
  - leisure related
  - other
- the college's capacity to meet (all or some) of these needs
- the current take-up of training by SMEs:
  - provided by the college
  - provided by others.
- any firms attempting to gain, or which currently hold, IIP or other quality kitemarks
- the likely range of the firms' budget for training
- possible sources of funding for training
- any recent or proposed legislation which will require training in any of these firms
- any small business clubs/support groups for the SMEs in the area
- how the college currently markets to its SMEs how this could be improved
- the current methods the college uses to deliver training to SMEs e.g. one day, evening,weekend, block; open, flexible.
  - where this takes place e.g. in college, on site.
- any concessions for payment of fees e.g. business accounts; staggered payments; discounts, etc.
- TECs' views on labour market needs for SMEs and subsequent training requirements
- potential for collaborative ventures between the college and TEC
- the college's priorities for the provision of training for SMEs:
  - over the next 12 months
  - over the next 3 years

### Determining priorities

#### *Mapping exercise summary and identification of training needs*

1 The college's 'catchment' area spans three TEC areas.

2 Need to redefine catchment area because non-traditional delivery mechanisms are not constrained by geography.

3 County characteristics:

- female v male employment increasing 5:1
- 33,000 businesses
- 95% SMEs
- 40% in our TEC
- increased by 45% since 1979
- slight decrease between 1992–4
- largest increase in Other Services: Business, Personal and Entertainment

4 County strategy is to develop companies which use:

- high technology-based production methods
- well-trained managers, technicians and professionals
- to design and produce high-quality specialist products

5 Investors in People take-up in Hertfordshire:

- SMEs – 200 committed, 21 recognised
- larger businesses – 105 committed, 11 recognised

6 Trends by sector:

- Up – other services – above average
- Down – Transport, Wholesale, Finance – above average
- Agriculture, Catering, Motor Vehicle, Retail, Production and Construction – below average

7 Length of time in business:

- 50% cease within five years (national average is eight)
- short termism: nature of financial arrangements
- over-optimism
- lack of managerial skills, awareness and education

8 Perspectives of training needs:

- Labour market information (LMI): technical, professional, IT, team working, problem solving
- Business Link: business planning, review, production design, selling, marketing
- SME managers:company and European legislation, financial packaging

9 Take-up of training:

- 53% used training to meet skills gaps (TEC Employer Survey 1995)
- 42% used funded training
- 47% used recruitment

Evidence that SMEs

- learn from their customers
- do not feel they need additional skills for next year (TEC Employer Survey, 1995)

10 Sources of Funding – DfE, TEC, Competitiveness Fund, SRB, European Funding

11 The challenge for FE colleges is to know how to help SMEs learn. Research by Templeton College, Oxford, showed that a key success factor for growth in small businesses is the 'flexible and non-conformist nature of the manager'. FE colleges are notas flexible as they need to be ; they have a 'tradition' and a 'framework' which demand conformist behaviour.

### Relationship to strategic plan

Hertford Regional College is developing systems and materials to allow SMEs remote access to computer-based training packages, partly in recognition of SMEs's difficulties releasing people from work for traditional training. The college strategic plan for 1996–7 states :

> *By August 1999, the college will have developed and implemented a plan for the establishment of a high band width network for the delivery of learning materials within the college and to external learning centres'.*

### Involvement with partners

The college is linking with Herttordshire TEC and other relevant organisations at a strategic level, as well as a practical one, to influence the learning and development of the county and its wealth of SMEs.

A forum has recently emerged within the county comprised of the TEC, Business Link, local education authority, University of Hertfordshire, and FE colleges. This forum is seeking to develop a learning strategy for the county in response to the myriad overlapping and interconnecting IT-based developments (ADAPT, Competitiveness Fund, Conver, SRB). All forum players have accessed a number of UK and European funds. Strategic and practical guidance is now needed for the local partnerships (seven in all) which exist in the county. The challenge is to co-ordinate the use of these funds to enable SMEs to get the best use from them and to enhance the county's prospects of securing additional funds in the future. The forum supports the concept of connected learning centres by encouraging information flows and co-operation between and within the local partnerships.

In addition, arrangements have been made to liaise closely with the Business Links 'IT Adviser' – a personal business adviser dedicated to assisting companies to develop good practice in using computer-based information, communication, design and manufacturing technologies.

# Appendix 2: Criteria for college action-planning pro forma

## 1 Determining priorities

This section should include:

- a summary of the results of the mapping exercise
- identification of the target SMEs
- an indication of likely training needs
- the college's capacity to meet these needs
- the relationship of the proposed activity to the college's strategic plan
- how TEC involvement will be sought and the form this will take.

***Note:*** *Due to the relatively short timescale of the project and speculative nature of the work there may be different targets for 2 and 3 below, i.e. you may wish to develop processes for designing and delivering learning programmes for which you have already secured contracts but which you also want to market to new firms. From the project's perspective it is important that some new initiatives are developed and tested.*

## 2 Promotion and marketing strategies

This should indicate:

- how initial contact will be made
- what follow-up action will be taken
- who will be responsible for these activities
- internal communication systems and reporting mechanisms required
- the timescale for the activity
- the systems for quality control assurance.

***Note:*** *The important feature of this activity is establishing the business case for training to the SMEs. The ongoing and final reports on your progress towards achieving this are of vital importance to the project.*

## 3 Designing and delivering learning programmes

This should outline processes which are in place, or need to be developed:

- preliminary discussions with employers
- detailed programme planning
- staff development or training
- delivery of the training
- review and evaluation.

## 4 Management and reporting procedures

This should identify:

- who has overall responsibility for the initiative
- how, and by whom, day-to-day management will be undertaken
- how relationships with outside bodies e.g. the TEC will be managed
- internal and external reporting procedures e.g. to line managers, a steering group, FEDA.

# Appendix 3: Case studies

## 1 Matthew Boulton College

Sans Serif is a typical SME operating in the Birmingham print sector offering design, copy setting and typesetting services, soon to expand into printing.

During the last five years the company has faced a number of challenges, mainly focused on the application of new technologies in typesetting and graphic reproduction. This has meant that more sophisticated work – especially in colour – formerly undertaken by specialists such as Sans Serif has become cheaper and has been brought in-house by the client.

One of the major effects on Sans Serif has been to reduce the workforce of 40 typesetting specialists to just 23, all of whom need a broader platform of skills.

Aware of the need to retrain and develop new skills, Sans Serif saw the project – Skills Investment – as an opportunity to offset the costs of a planned programme of staff development.

Matthew Boulton College was initially contracted to undertake a training needs analysis of all employees, from which a report was produced identifying a series of company-wide issues and individual needs. One-to-one discussions were subsequently held between the Managing Director and each employee, from which action plans were agreed in the form of individual learning agreements. Emphasis was placed on the links between learning objectives and the overall objectives of the business.

The next stage was the development of a training plan for the company and a commitment to the achievement of the Investors in People award. The plan and the various actions have now been implemented, with help from Birmingham TEC in the form of a 50% subsidy. Most of the actions are 'bespoke', tailored to the technologies and working practices of the company.

These include:

- Apple Mac training in the application of graphic design software
- German for beginners
- an NVQ in cleaning science
- business planning.

All of these were contracted to Matthew Boulton College. The next phase includes training in the use of the Internet and aspects of print management.

According to the Managing Director, the first phase of training has already led to a noticeable difference in the workforce – 'they are much happier and show a willingness to learn'. Although it is anticipated that about 10% of the workforce will be lost to other companies, the remaining 90% will be committed and have the skills to secure the company's future prosperity. The company is currently applying for a National Training Award.

## 2 Halton College

The original starting point for our current work with SMEs was a successful bid for Competitiveness Fund monies to establish accommodation which would be separate from mainstream college provision and which would provide high-quality and cost-effective solutions to the training needs of SMEs, particularly in the engineering and chemical sectors, through the use of computer-based technology.

Having been successful with the bid and set up the centre, the next step was to advise local SMEs that this new facility was available at Halton College. The quickest way was to mailshot approximately 700 companies that had been identified within Halton, North and Mid Cheshire TEC and Business Link Halton assisted us by identifying companies from their databases.

The response to the mailshot was very poor, and we realised that if we were to establish links with all of these companies a more personal approach would be required. It was decided that a telemarketing person would be employed on an occasional basis to follow-up the mailshot and to promote the new facilities at the same time.

This proved to be very successful. Companies liked the pro-active approach, as it was not something that the college had previously done. The telemarketing was used to set up appointments for centre staff to visit companies and outline the new facilities and other changes that had occurred since incorporation.

One of the companies contacted was a local chemical company with approximately 80 employees. The training manager was pleased to receive our call because they were in the process of upgrading their computer systems and were uncertain as to which particular applications software to adopt.

They had already decided that it would either be Microsoft Office Professional or Lotus SmartSuite but they were undecided about which. The centre offered to put on an appraisal course during which we would present both applications and outline the differences and similarities of each product. The Managing Director and nine employees attended the course which was extremely well received. The company subsequently chose the Microsoft product.

Having decided which product to adopt they now had a further training requirement – to teach their employees the basics of the various applications.

Subsequent training has been provided on Microsoft Excel, Word, PowerPoint and Windows 3.1.

Employees have also attended half-day seminars on the Internet and on Advanced Communications.

Building a good relationship with the company is essential. Personal contact, both on the telephone and in person is important in developing links, as is continuing contact on a regular basis.

The company has since supported the college in our bids for further project funding.

# FEDA publication series

## Developing FE: Volume 1

1 Student tracking
2 Caseloading
3 Assessing the impact: provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities
4 Adults and GNVQs
5 On course for next steps: careers education and guidance for students in FE
6 Marketing planning
7 Managing change in FE
8 The effective college library
9 Appraisal in FE – where are we now?
10 Clarity is power: learner outcomes, learner autonomy and transferable skills

## **FEDA Reports** (formerly Developing FE): Volume 2

1 Investing partners: further education, economic development and regional policy
2 Women at the top in further education
3 Moving into FE: the voice of the learner
4 Additional support, retention and guidance in urban colleges
5 Qualifications for the future: a study of tripartite and other divisions in post-16 education and training

## FE Matters: Volume 1

1 Environmental education throughout FE 1: policy and strategy
2 Environmental education throughout FE 2: a model and unit of environmental learning outcomes
3 Colleges working with industry
4 Towards self-assessing colleges
5 Evidence for action: papers prepared for FEFC's Learning and Technology Committee
6 Student retention: case studies of strategies that work
7 Getting the credit: OCN accreditation and learners with learning difficulties and disabilities
8 Moving on from Key Stage 4 – the challenge for FE
9 Monitoring student attendance
10 Educational psychologists in further education
11 Assuring coherence in individual learning programmes
12 Adult learners: pathways to progression
13 A real job with prospects: supported employment opportunities for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities
14 Transforming teaching: selecting and evaluating teaching strategies
15 Information and learning technology: a development handbook
16 Delivering Modern Apprenticeships
17 Planning a merger of FE colleges
18 Tackling drugs together: addressing the issues in the FE sector
19 Security is not an option – learning in a safe environment
20 Give us some credit: achieving a comprehensive FE framework

## FE Matters: Volume 2

1 Youth work in colleges: building on partnership
2 The shrinking world: international links with FE
3 A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning
4 Learning with business: FE staff development to business and industry
5 Beyond responsiveness: promoting good practice in economic development
6 Making learning support work
7 Initial assessment to identify learning needs
8 Staff development for student retention in further and adult education

## FEDA Bulletins: Volume 1

1 Quality assurance in colleges
2 The impact of voucher schemes on the FE curriculum
3 Enhancing GCE A-level programmes
4 Developing college policies and strategies for human resource development
5 Maintaining quality during curriculum change
6 Action planning and recording achievement
7 Implementing modular A-levels
8 Comparing content in selected GCE A-levels and Advanced GNVQs
9 Engineering the future: monitoring the pilot GNVQ in engineering
10 Charters in FE: making them work
11 Access to accreditation
12 Back to the future: what are Modern Apprenticeships?
13 Competing for business: colleges and the Competitiveness Fund
14 Information systems: a strategic approach
15 Strategic approaches to processes, cultures and structures

## FEDA Bulletins: Volume 2

1 Partners in economic developement
2 Assuring quality in collaborative provision
3 Student stress in an FE college: an empirical study

# FE matters

SMEs – small and medium sized enterprises – make up 99% of all UK business, yet contribute only 42% of total UK turnover. A learning culture needs to be developed in these businesses to counter short-termism and day to day 'firefighting'. *Promoting learning in small and medium sized enterprises* suggests how FE colleges can provide support and training to help SMEs fulfil their potential. It includes advice on the design, delivery and marketing of relevant programmes, an audit research tool, and a pro forma for action planning.

39

ISSN 1361 9977 || *matters* Vol 2 No 9 Price £7.50